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Nessletter

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RIP'S PIECE.

Dear friends, as I consider members to be, it is so long since you received a Nessletter you may have thought they had sunk without trace. I have been having a crisis of intent, I think that may describe the situation. Over recent times there has appeared on the Loch Ness scene a few newer researchers. In itself that should be a good thing, new blood, new ideas should always be welcome. However some of these people have exhibited an alarming attitude. They have been only too willing to accept any report of sightings and, however dubious it may be, promote it as a 'good' sighting. There has even been cases of deliberately falsified evidence. Perhaps because they give the media what it requires, that is a silly story or a headline, these people have achieved a high profile on the Loch Ness scene. That in itself, does not really bother me, I have never looked for self publicity. What does bother me is that with their attitude they are presenting Loch Ness and the mystery in a poor light. If not right now, it will become obvious to researchers and investigators as time passes, to the detriment of the serious researchers. For twenty-five years I have been producing the Nessletters, and I believe, I have always tried to advocate caution and careful analysis before any reported sighting can be given any creditability. Every possible solution must be looked at and considered. If not enough information is available, that should be made clear and the report presented as doubtful. Thirty-five years ago I first visited the loch and found the L.N.P.I.B., since then I have spent my holidays at the loch every year. As well as that I spent two full seasons with the L.N.I. (as it had become), in '70/'71. This experience made it clear that investigators had to be very careful. It is possible to point to mistakes that the L.N.I. made, but remember, as the first they were learning how to go on and formulating ground rules. So it is very disappointing that some of the newer investigators seem not willing to learn from the mistakes that I and others, have made, and adopt care and caution. It would seem that all these, so called believers, are interested in is self-aggrandisement and publicity. As well as perhaps a 'quick buck'. I have become disheartened to see these people debasing Loch Ness and it's mystery. When they are happy to falsify evidence, or state that all they want are any reports to publicise 'Nessie'. My reaction has become 'to hell with it' let them get on, not a happy situation.

Doris' health is not what we would wish it to be, she has emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which has been ongoing for some time and gradually getting worse. While I was at the loch last August she had been taken poorly, and should have been into hospital. She had pleaded with the doctor to wait until I returned home, later that week. Then she was straight in, oxygen and medication, for ten days. She was in again just after New Year, for another week, at the moment she is not too bad. As a result I have become more and more responsible for looking after ourselves and our home. I have a part time job, mini-bus driving children to and from school. So I am able to fill my time with all sorts of useful things to do. Combine that with the feeling described above, and perhaps you can understand why the Nessletters have faltered. Saying that, not a day passes without me thinking of the Nessletters and feeling guilty because I am not meeting your requirements, that is a regular, and possibly frequent, source of reliable news and views about the loch.

There are others who have done a great deal over the years to bring some sort of respectability to the Loch Ness scene. To begin there was the Loch Ness Investigation. Then Bob Rines and the Academy of Applied Sciences, first working with the LNI, and later on their own. I know it is now possible to find fault with the way they presented findings, but they were very sincere and put a great deal of effort and commitment into their work. Now we have Alastair Boyd, Dick Raynor and of course Adrian Shine among others. Mention of Adrian could bring forth cries of 'Sturgeon!!', rightly so. However, I feel that no other has done as much over the years to bring scientists from many disciplines to the loch, than Adrian and the Loch Ness Project. Teams from a number of Universities have undertaken various studies, working with the Project. The Simrad people first visited the loch through Adrian. While he has seemed to rock the 'monster' boat on occasion, he has always been looking for explanations to the mystery. Seeking the truth, as I believe most of us are. These people have raised the research and investigations at the loch from the cartoon world of the drunken Scot, with bottle in hand, being the only witness to the Loch Ness monster. To that of serious, believable, even scientific, work being done to try to find answers to the age old mystery. The cavalier

attitude of some of the more recent 'researchers' is in danger of dragging it down again. This must be resisted, so perhaps I should try to sort myself out.

Now I have managed to get finger onto keyboard I must try to get, and keep, my act together. One thing I will promise, should the Nessletters eventually founder everyone will receive notification, of some sort, and portions of unused subscriptions will be returned.

SIGHTINGS

1999 was a fairly barren year for acceptable sighting reports. I have had no more good reports from my usual contacts, the only further news I picked up was there was word of four vague stories. None of which amounted to much because they did not progress beyond 'vague'. This is disappointing, but also interesting. I understand that William Hills (bookmaker) prize for the 'best Nessie sighting' was £500 plus a free £500 bet, no one has tried to claim it. For the Millennium year 2000, I believe that prize has gone up to £1000. When I met Steve Feltham at the loch last August, he had an intriguing thought about the lack of reported sightings. He suggested, that because of the increased publicity caused by certain parties at the loch and the involvement of Hills, the locals had become unwilling to tell anyone of their experiences. It would seem they are unwilling to become part of a publicity circus, even with the offer of rewards. I feel there could be something in that. It would also seem to illustrate the integrity of people living round the loch. There has not been a rush of dreamt up sighting reports in an attempt to lay hands on the cash. We can perhaps take heart from that.

I think it is also of interest that, once again, the prize for 'best Nessie sighting' was awarded retrospectively. That in March '99 Robert Badger was given the award for an event that happened in August '71. The story was, that while a volunteer with the LNI expedition, he was doing underwater work on a new boat mooring off Temple Pier. He had swum a little further out and reaching the point where the bottom drops away sharply decide that was perhaps far enough, when something materialised out of the gloom in front of him. The sheer size of the object, plus the murkiness of the water, meant he had been unable to see either end of it. The body appeared rounded and about 20 feet in diameter, it had been travelling towards the main part of the loch, out of the bay. The article said that he thought of earlier reports and words such as 'flesh-eating' flashed through his mind. He surfaced and headed for the shore as fast as possible, one of his companions commented that Mr Badger 'had erupted from the water'. Graham Sharpe, for William Hill said, the report ranked as among the most vivid experience anyone could have.

I remember the incident as I was on the LNI resident staff during '70 and '71. Robert Badger, 'Brock' to other expeditioners, was a robust young Scot, a cheerful, no nonsense, do anything type, not given to flights of fancy. Ideal candidate for expedition, his skin-diving experience making him doubly useful. At that time we needed a new mooring in Urquhart Bay, close to Temple Pier, for the LNI work-boat 'Narwhal'. It was to be in about 20 feet of water and someone with diving experience would be valuable, to make sure the concrete blocks were lying correctly and the shackles etc. secure. That someone was Brock. My memory of the incident ties in with the quite well account in the papers. After getting Brock back ashore, the small party returned to LNI HQ, Achnahannet, where a sighting report form was duly filled out. There was no great fuss made about it, and he did not claim he had seen the Monster, just a vague 'something' in the gloom. He said there was no impression of great speed, just a shape 'cruising' by. His field of vision was limited by the face-mask he was wearing, so he was not aware of the extremities, in the brief glimpse he got. It did seem to be cylindrical, curved top to bottom, the estimate he put on it was 6 feet in diameter. The account in the paper ties in with my recollection quite well, only gaining a little in size and a bit of 'flesh-eating' drama. His sighting report would be filed away in the 'inconclusive' section.

What Brock saw on that dive will remain a puzzle. At Achnahannet in '71, he was not sure what he had seen. Could it have been a trick of the dim light filtering through fifteen feet of peaty loch water or some other natural occurrence? Whatever it was, it left him somewhat subdued for the rest of his stay that season, which for someone of his outgoing nature was strange, and, as I said, he was not one given to flights of fancy. One of his other claims to fame was to swim across the loch. It was possibly earlier during his '71 stay, when he said he would like to try. So one evening after the day's activities I took him, and one or two others, in 'Fussy Hen' from the harbour below Achnahannet along to the Castle. Brock, in wet suit minus flippers, went ashore by the Water Gate then he set off and swam across to the 'White Beach', opposite, with 'Fussy Hen' in close proximity in case of trouble. We need not have worried. He made good steady

progress and went ashore without bother, a distance just under a mile and a quarter. He then came back aboard, and we made our way back to HQ and celebrations.

Writing of Brock's encounter reminded me of an even closer encounter the previous year, '70. Bob Love, sponsored by Field Enterprise of Chicago, had worked with the LNI for a few seasons, using sonar mounted aboard the boat 'Rangitea'. They had some success with large underwater targets, possibly animate. They also did useful survey work, among which was the location, in '69, of a wreck in Urquhart Bay. This was lying in 80 feet of water off Temple Pier, it was re-located in '70 and a marker buoy attached. That season Bob Love and his underwater team were working with a small group sponsored by the Black and White Scotch company, experimenting with infra-red cameras. They also took time to investigate the Temple Pier wreck. From their findings it was established it was, is, a half size 'Zulu'. The 'Zulu' was a trading craft developed in the 1890s and said to be the fastest thing afloat in those days, having a distinctive pointed stern. Now back to our close encounter. Late in the season two divers were returning to the surface after a dive onto the wreck, they were as usual following the marker buoy rope up. Some halfway up, about forty feet of water above and below, the second, lower, diver felt his foot touch something solid!! Talking about it afterwards, he said there were no parts of the wreck extending that far, they had never encountered anything before so it was not a feature of the area, i.e. rock or stone, sunken tree. Nothing was seen in the dark, just a very definite contact between his foot, in flipper, and a solid object. I cannot put a name to the diver, but I know Ivor Newby did some diving with them, and his name comes to mind in connection. Once again a strange occurrence, with no obvious explanation, apart from asking could it have been one of our elusive friends from the depths of the loch swimming by?

2000 opened with a report in the Dundee Courier, 10th Jan. '00. On Saturday 8th Jan. John Catto, a former soldier, and his fiancée were driving towards Drumnadrochit, they both saw what appeared to be an upturned boat. It was 15 feet from the shore, 5 feet tall and the length of a three seat settee. No other details such as weather, time of day, colour or movement were given. Nor was the direction they were travelling. The object was said to be 15 feet from the shore, there are very few places where the shore, or 15 feet from it, can be seen while driving. One such place is on the approach from Inverness, as you round the headland into Urquhart Bay. There is a brief glimpse of the water through the trees, so that could be the location. Although Loch Ness was mentioned, not Urquhart Bay. I wonder why the change in measuring units from feet, to three seat settees? 5 feet tall by a three seat settee long, which I would say is about 7 or 8 feet, gives a very unusual shape, almost semi-circular. I know the paper may have had further details, and not bothered printing them, without more information this is a questionable report. It does have a strange similarity to a sighting report from within days of a year earlier, New Year's Eve '99 (NIS 135). Kevin Ross, with some military background, and his fiancée, reported an 'upturned boat' some way off the shore by the Abriachan Pier.

ANOTHER CONTACT?

The Inverness Courier, 17th Aug. '99, carried a story by Vivian Owers, a former motor launch commander in the Royal Navy. Now 77 years old, he recalled an incident from 1944 when he read an article in the Courier while visiting his old home in the area. It concerned Bob Rines' work at Loch Ness. He was Commanding Officer of H.M.M.L. 466, one of an eight strong flotilla, based at Scarpa Flow. In January '44 they had been due off Nairn to practise for the forthcoming D-Day landings. On the particular day the weather was so poor the exercise had been moved to Loch Ness. He said everything was going to plan until one of the craft, H.M.M.L. 442 skippered by an Australian, nicknamed Digger, struck something in the water. When the 112 feet long motor launch docked at Thornbush slipway, Inverness, for repairs, it was discovered that two of the propeller blades had been lost but the third, along with the rudder post, was still intact, showing no signs of damage. Mr Owers said: "It was very strange. There was no debris floating in the water. We could not think of it being anything else but the Monster. There is plenty of power in those propellers so it must have been something substantial to do that kind of damage. We were convinced it must have been the Monster. Everyone on the eight craft got to hear of it, and Digger was known as the man who tried to kill the Loch Ness Monster." An official report was made to the Admiralty about the damage, but the flotilla heard no more of it. Due to the 50 year ban imposed by the Admiralty on disclosure of certain classified information on wartime activities, Mr Owers had been unable to talk about it outside the Navy until now. Although it had been well discussed by the crew of Motor Launch 442, and had become a running joke with the 21st Flotilla.

I had read the article in the Courier, and Andreas Trottmann sent me a copy, it was also in his Loch Ness Clipping Service. He also contacted Mr Owers, and kindly sent me a copy of the reply he received.

Through a Naval friend in Australia, Mr Owers had tried to contact Digger Dunn, without success. He fears he may have passed away, as he knows Digger's First Lieutenant has. The reason for M.L. 442 carrying out engine trials on Loch Ness was because it was too foggy for sea trials, whilst Loch Ness was calm and clear. The craft was proceeding at full speed, 16 knots, down the centre of the loch, when the incident occurred. As a result of the contact the craft lost two of the three blades on the port propeller. There were no marks on the third blade nor were there any marks on the port rudder post, or rudder, only 18 inches behind the propeller. There were no marks on the starboard propeller or rudder. The craft were 112 feet long, powered by two 500 horsepower Hallscott engines. Each craft fitted with 5 petrol tanks, below decks, with an overall capacity of 3000 gallons. Known as 'Fairmile' B-type motor launches they carried a crew of between 16 and 20. They were the 21st M.L. flotilla, which was an anti-submarine flotilla based at Scarpa Flow. They moved to Dover for the D-Day operations, and then became a smoke-laying flotilla and from D-Day to Sept '44 escorted 7000 ships through the Dover straits.

That in itself would be a fascinating story. To someone of my age, a youngster during the war (perhaps I should say World War II) the torpedo boats were favourites, the big battleships were very impressive, but torpedo boats were, to us, the glory boys, the pirate types, dashing about in small craft harrying the enemy. Now older and wiser I think I can appreciate what terrible things the crews must have endured. Anyway back to Loch Ness. There can be no doubt the craft hit something, but what? A semi-submerged tree trunk would be a candidate. It was said there was no debris seen. Moving at 16 knots, would the debris have been left a fair way behind before anyone looked for it? If a tree, or similar, why just the damage caused? Shouldn't the rudder have been struck, or the starboard set of propeller and rudder? If the monster, would flesh and bone have been substantial enough to snap off two prop blades? Blades made of phosphor-bronze. Again this is one of those so tantalising reports that always taunt us.

Andreas had also contacted Rontronics in Inverness, concerning the results of their recent sonar sweeps in Loch Ness, that was late August '99. Unfortunately they just sent him some bumph about their highly sophisticated sonar equipment! At about that time Andreas parted with his beloved boat 'The Witch of the Mist'. She is now based at Dornoch and will be used for coastal fishing trips. The project had become too costly, bearing in mind the rather short periods of time he was/is able to spend at the loch. He hopes to continue his sonar researches, by using a hired boat.

HOLIDAYS

A few lines about my '99 visit to the loch. I arrived on Sunday 1st August, no family just the cat. In the evening Dick Raynor called and took me out in Nessie Hunter. For some of my time there I was to be involved with his work deploying an underwater camera rig, he had designed and built, and help as the shore base station for monitoring it. This we succeeded in doing. There is much more I must tell you about it next time. I met up with a few NIS members, also at the loch, Val Smith and his son, Stuart Leadbetter, Doug and Margaret Macfarlane, Alastair and Sue Boyd. Also got round to see Steve Feltham a few times. Attended two 50th birthday parties on the shores of Loch Ness. A good time had, will bore you with it at later date.

At last NIS136 finished, it has taken quite a time and there should have been more in it. I have said before as I reach the end of Nessletters, I should continue straight on and get another to you quickly. But things I should have done have piled up, and by the time I catch up I am behind again. Ain't life a bitch!

Two videos just received from Dick, 'The First Underwater Video' and 'The First Time Lapse Video.' The former is self explanatory, have a close look at some of the bottom in Urquhart Bay. The second shows at least two weeks of surface watching, from Dores, each day compressed into about five minutes. Full details from D. Raynor, 4 Kilmuir, N. Kessock, Inverness, IV1 3ZG. He says please visit the website at www.dickraynor.co.uk

Subscriptions remain UK. £2.75, N.America, \$10.00., for at least six issues. I put notes on Nessletters when subs are due, it may be an idea to wait until you receive notification. Thank you for your tolerance, remember news and views are always welcome and needed. Address remains:- R.R.Heppele, 7 Huntshieldsford, St John's Chapel, Weardale, Co Durham, DL13 1RQ. Tel 01388 537359.

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